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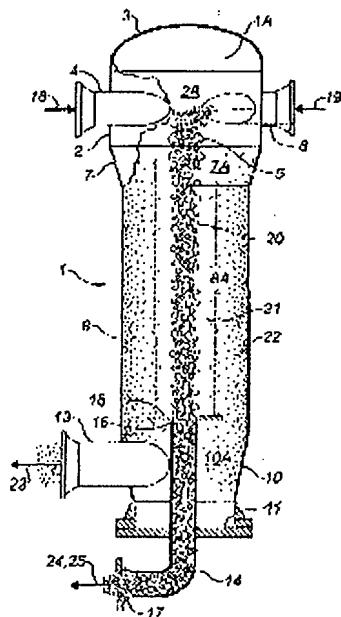
(12) Patent:

(11) CA 2246841

(54) CYCLOSEPARATOR FOR REMOVAL OF COARSE SOLIDS FROM
CONDITIONED OIL SAND SLURRIES

(54) SEPARATEUR CYCLONE POUR LE PIEGEAGE DE PARTICULES SOLIDES GROSSIERES CONTENUES DANS LES SUSPENSIONS CONDITIONNEES DE SABLES BITUMINEUX

Representative Drawing:



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ABSTRACT:

A large capacity cyclonic separator is used for desanding a conditioned aqueous oil sand slurry comprising aerated bitumen, water and sand to produce pumpable, pipelineable lean froth and sand tailings. The cyclone separator is a vessel which forms an elongated cylindrical separation chamber and has a tangential slurry inlet at one end and, at the opposite end, a peripheral sand removal outlet and a centrally positioned vortex finder. Oil sand slurry is continually tangentially introduced into the cyclone separator to form a rotating vortex, which generates a centrifugal force. The lean froth migrates to the center of the vortex to form an inner core and is removed via the vortex finder. The sand tailings migrate to the outer reaches of the vortex and are co-currently removed via the sand removal outlet.

CLAIMS: Show all claims

*** Note: Data on abstracts and claims is shown in the official language in which it was submitted.

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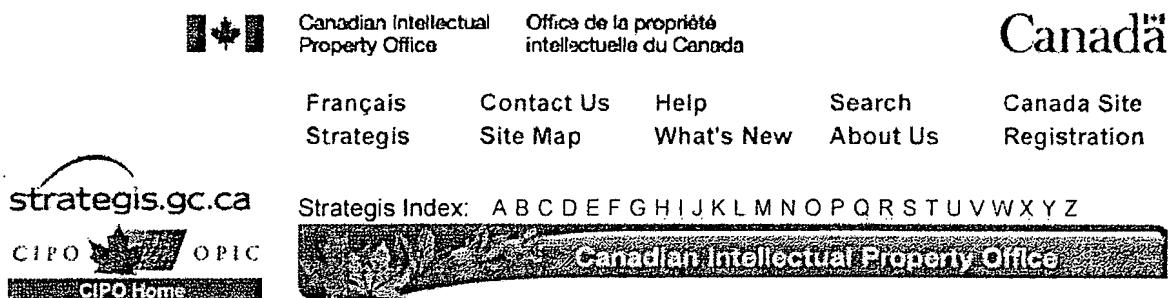
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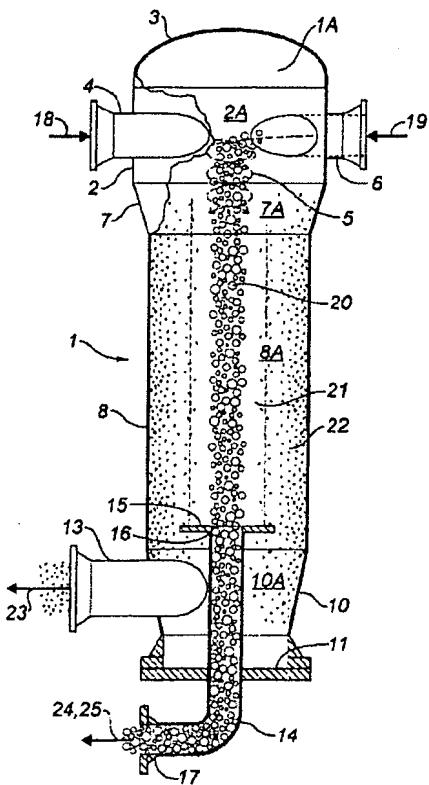
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DANS LES SUSPENSIONS CONDITIONNÉES DE SABLES BITUMINEUX

(54) Title: CYCLOSEPARATOR FOR REMOVAL OF COARSE SOLIDS FROM CONDITIONED OIL SAND SLURRIES



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

A large capacity cyclonic separator is used for desanding a conditioned aqueous oil sand slurry comprising aerated bitumen, water and sand to produce pumpable, pipelineable lean froth and sand tailings. The cyclone separator is a vessel which forms an elongated cylindrical separation chamber and has a tangential slurry inlet at one end and, at the opposite end, a peripheral

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sand removal outlet and a centrally positioned vortex finder. Oil sand slurry is continually tangentially introduced into the cyclone separator to form a rotating vortex, which generates a centrifugal force. The lean froth migrates to the center of the vortex to form an inner core and is removed via the vortex finder. The sand tailings migrate to the outer reaches of the vortex and are concurrently removed via the sand removal outlet.

4 **ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE**

5 A large capacity cyclonic separator is used for desanding a conditioned
6 aqueous oil sand slurry comprising aerated bitumen, water and sand to
7 produce pumpable, pipelineable lean froth and sand tailings. The cyclone
8 separator is a vessel which forms an elongated cylindrical separation
9 chamber and has a tangential slurry inlet at one end and, at the opposite end,
10 a peripheral sand removal outlet and a centrally positioned vortex finder. Oil
11 sand slurry is continually tangentially introduced into the cyclone separator to
12 form a rotating vortex, which generates a centrifugal force. The lean froth
13 migrates to the center of the vortex to form an inner core and is removed via
14 the vortex finder. The sand tailings migrate to the outer reaches of the vortex
15 and are co-currently removed via the sand removal outlet.

1 **"CYCLOSEPARATOR FOR REMOVAL OF COARSE SOLIDS FROM**
2 **CONDITIONED OIL SAND SLURRIES"**

3

4 **FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

5 The present invention relates to the separation of coarse solids from
6 conditioned oil sand slurries and relates more particularly to the use of a large
7 capacity, cylindrical cyclonic separator capable of processing dense oil sand
8 slurries, containing large lumps, to produce lean froth and sand tailings. The
9 process involves co-current centrifugal separation with both sand and lean
10 froth products flowing in the same direction in a centrifugal force.

11

12 **BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

13 Oil sand, as known in the Fort McMurray region of Alberta, Canada,
14 comprises water-wet sand grains having viscous bitumen flecks trapped
15 between the grains. It lends itself to separating or dispersing the bitumen
16 from the sand grains by slurring the as-mined oil sand in heated water so
17 that the bitumen flecks move into the aqueous phase.

18 For the past 25 years, the bitumen in McMurray oil sand has been
19 commercially recovered using a hot water process. In general terms, the hot
20 water process that is practiced at applicants' plant today involves:

21 • supplying heated water at the mine site;

- 1 • mixing the dry as-mined oil sand with the heated water at the mine
- 2 site in predetermined proportions using a device known as a
- 3 “cyclofeeder”, to form a slurry of controlled density having a
- 4 temperature in the order of 50°C;
- 5 • screening the slurry to remove oversize solids too large to be fed to
- 6 the pipeline;
- 7 • pumping the slurry to the extraction plant through several
- 8 kilometers of pipeline;
- 9 • further diluting the slurry with heated water; and
- 10 • separating the bitumen from the rest of the oil sand slurry using
- 11 gravity separation vessels and flotation cells.

12 A recent development in the recovery of bitumen from oil sand involves
13 a low energy extraction process (LEE process). The LEE process involves:

- 14 • dry mining the oil sand;
- 15 • mixing the as-mined oil sand with water in predetermined
- 16 proportions near the mine site to produce a slurry having a
- 17 controlled density in the range 1.4 to 1.65 g/cc and a temperature in
- 18 the range 20 - 35°C;
- 19 • pumping the slurry from the mine site to the extraction plant through
- 20 a pipeline having a plurality of pumps spaced along its length;
- 21 • adding air to the slurry, preferably in the pipeline after the last
- 22 pump, in an amount up to 2.5 volumes of air per volume of slurry, to
- 23 form an aerated slurry; and

1 • separating the bitumen from the rest of the oil sand slurry using
2 gravity separation vessels and flotation cells.

3 In both of the aforementioned processes, much of the conditioning of
4 the oil slurry takes place in the pipeline. Here, the larger lumps of oil sand are
5 ablated and the released bitumen flecks coalesce and attach to air bubbles.
6 At this stage the slurry is commonly referred to as "conditioned slurry". Once
7 the slurry reaches the extraction site, the aerated bitumen is then separated
8 from the rest of the oil sand slurry using gravity separation and flotation.
9 Primary separation of the bitumen from the solids occurs in large capacity
10 gravity settlers called primary separation vessels (PSVs), where the slurry is
11 divided into primary bitumen froth, middlings (water, fines and bitumen) and
12 coarse tailings (coarse solids, water, and residual bitumen). The bitumen still
13 remaining in the middlings fraction is recovered in flotation cells where air is
14 added and further separation of bitumen from solids occurs. The tailings that
15 are separated are then transported to sand disposal sites.

16 As the mining area increases in the Fort McMurray region, the location
17 of mining faces and the location of the sand disposal sites become more and
18 more remote from the extraction plant. The extraction plant is comprised of a
19 number of very large PSVs, TOR settling tanks, flotation cells, etc.
20 Therefore, its location must remain permanent, as the equipment cannot be
21 readily moved. Also, the cost of building new extraction plants at various
22 other sites would be prohibitive. Therefore, slurry that is produced at a
23 remote mine site will have to travel a great distance to the stationary
24 extraction plant and therefore longer pipelines will be required. Further, once

1 separation has occurred at the extraction site, the tailings will have to be
2 transported to sand disposal sites that may also be a long distance from the
3 extraction site. The bulk of the slurry (i.e. 50 to 60% by mass) is sand which
4 must be transported first to extraction sites and then to disposal sites. All of
5 this is costly. Clearly it would be much more cost effective if the sand could
6 be separated from the conditioned slurry at a location closer to the mining
7 site, the disposal site, or both. Therefore, a portable sand separator has
8 been developed to separate the coarse tailings from the bitumen and
9 middlings at a convenient location at the time. The process of removing
10 coarse sand from an oil sand aqueous slurry is commonly referred to as
11 "desanding".

12 Several factors have to be considered when developing a portable
13 sand separator. The oil sand slurry in question, having been prepared by
14 either of the two methods described above, is a unique feed stock. The slurry
15 tends to be very dense (on average 1.6 sg) and contains a considerable
16 amount of solids including rocks up to 4 inches in any dimension. Therefore,
17 it is necessary to have a separator that can handle slurries with high
18 concentrations of solids and large objects in both the feed and the effluent.

19 In addition, oil sand slurry varies with respect to its solids, water and
20 bitumen content depending upon the oil sand grade, the process used to
21 produce the slurry, the time of year the slurry is prepared, etc. (a slurry can
22 contain anywhere from 50 to 65 wt % solids, 25 to 40 wt % water and 5 to 10
23 wt % bitumen). Therefore, it is necessary to have a separator that is capable
24 of being controlled so that the volumetric split between the effluent (the heavy

1 phase) and the centrate (the light phase) can be manipulated. Also, very
2 large volumes of oil sand slurry are continuously being produced and pumped
3 through pipelines with an inner diameter of 24 to 30 inches. Therefore, if a
4 separator were to be hooked up directly to a pipeline, it would often have to
5 be capable of handling volumetric flow rates in the order of 25,000 to 40,000
6 U.S. GPM.

7 Finally, it is desirable that the separator be capable of separating
8 substantially all solids larger than 44 microns or greater from the remainder of
9 the slurry including middlings and bitumen froth.

10 There are no commercially available cyclonic separators that are
11 capable of handling the large volumetric flow rates required and still reject
12 most coarse solids. For example, there are many conical cyclonic separators
13 on the market that are capable of removing solids as small as 44 microns.
14 However, the flow rate range of these separators is only 200 to 1,000 U.S.
15 GPM. Therefore, in order to accommodate the volume of slurry in question,
16 one would have to use a cluster of such separators. For instance, if one were
17 to use a separator with a capacity of 300 U.S. GPM, approximately 130
18 separators would be needed to handle 40,000 U.S. GPM of slurry. Further,
19 the cluster would require a separate feed distributor, manifolds with shut off
20 valves, overflow and underflow sumps and support structures with access
21 platforms. Therefore, a complete installation of such a cluster of separators is
22 both complex and costly.

1 There are other commercially available cyclonic separators that can
2 handle larger flow rates (up to 10,000 U.S. GPM). However, these separators
3 are unable to provide the desired separation as they can only separate out
4 solids coarser than 150 to 250 microns. Further, these separators are not
5 designed to handle dense slurries or handle slurries containing particles with
6 diameters larger than 1 inch.

7 The use of a cyclonic separator for the separation and recovery of oil
8 from oil sands has been previously taught. Canadian Patent No. 970,309
9 issued to Davitt and U.S. Patent No. 5,316,664 issued to Gregoli et al both
10 teach a process for recovering bitumen from tar sands using a conical
11 hydrocyclone. However, the volume of slurry that can be accommodated by
12 these conical hydrocyclones is limited and a series of hydrocyclones is
13 necessary to handle the volumes in question.

14 In U.S. Patent No. 2,910,424 issued to Tek et al, a conical
15 hydrocyclone is used to separate oil from oil sands. However, in order for this
16 hydrocyclone to work, the oil sand feed must first be comminuted in a ball
17 mill, hammer mill, jaw crusher, etc. so that there are no large lumps and the
18 material introduced into the hydrocyclone is composed of particles smaller
19 than 1 mm in diameter. This design would not be capable of handling the oil
20 sand slurries in question.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

2 The present invention relates to a cyclonic separator and a process for
3 desanding oil sand slurry thus rendering a stream of lean bitumen froth
4 (preferably bitumen froth containing less than about 15% solids and more
5 than 10% bitumen).

6 One of the objectives of the present invention was to develop a sand
7 separator suitable for use in hydrotransport-based oil sand transport and
8 conditioning processes. In one such process, oil sand is slurried with heated
9 water in a cyclofeeder, pumped through a pipeline for a distance sufficient to
10 allow conditioning to occur, and then fed to the sand separator. The sand
11 separator would remove the coarse tailings for disposal, rendering lean
12 bitumen froth. The lean froth could then be pipelined to a froth separation
13 facility. This would reduce both the mass and the volume of material that has
14 to be transported over a long distance to the froth separation facility, or
15 extraction plant, and reduce the distance that the sand must be transported to
16 disposal. There would be a reduction of the volumetric flow rate to the PSVs
17 by some 60%. Further, the bulk of the coarse solids would be removed from
18 the slurry before it is fed into the PSV, which is advantageous for PSV
19 operation.

20 Another objective of the present invention was to provide a sand
21 separator capable of:

- handling very large oil sand slurry flow rates (up to 40,000 U.S. GPM);
- handling large lumps up to 4 inches in diameter;

1 • separating out the bulk of solid particles coarser than 44 microns;

2 • handling slurries with varying compositions containing anywhere

3 between 35 – 60% solids concentration; and

4 • controlling the split in the volumetric flow rate between the light

5 phase and the heavy phase by throttling the effluent flow to

6 optimize separation.

7 A further objective of the present invention was to provide a sand

8 separator having a low pressure drop in use, thereby allowing separators to

9 be linked in a series without an inter-stage pump. By discharging the coarse

10 sand tailings tangentially, the residual discharge pressure for feeding the next

11 stage is assured. This residual pressure permits the direct connection of a

12 plurality of stages in a series, without inter-stage pumps and pump boxes.

13 The effluent from the last separator can be hooked up directly to a tailings

14 disposal pump.

15 The invention is based on the discovery that a cylindrical cyclonic

16 separator, having a tangential slurry inlet at one end and a peripheral

17 (preferentially tangential) solids outlet and a central vortex finder outlet at the

18 other end, will satisfactorily desand an oil sand slurry. In operation, provided

19 that sufficient centrifugal force and retention time are provided, the introduced

20 slurry forms an irrotational vortex which separates slurry into an outer layer

21 containing most of the coarse solids, an intermediate layer of middlings and

22 an inner core containing most of the bitumen. The solids, which combine with

23 some middlings to form a coarse tailings stream, leave through the peripheral

24 outlet. The aerated bitumen, which combines with some middlings to form a

1 lean froth stream, leaves through the vortex finder. It has been determined by
2 testing:

3 • that the lean froth is reduced in sand content;
4 • that the losses of bitumen with the tailings are at acceptable levels;

5 and

6 • that the cylindrical separator vessel can handle high flow rates and
7 lumps up to four inches in diameter.

8 Broadly stated, in one aspect the invention is directed to a novel
9 cyclonic separator for separating bitumen from sand and water comprising:

10 • a closed vessel forming a substantially cylindrical vortex chamber,
11 said vessel having a tangential feed inlet at its first end and a
12 peripheral, preferably tangential, outlet at its second end for the
13 solid effluent; and

14 • a tubular vortex finder extending centrally into the cylindrical vortex
15 chamber at its second end, said vortex finder preferably including a
16 vortex holding disc mounted on the lip of the finder, said vortex
17 finder providing an outlet for the centrate or aerated bitumen phase.

18 In a more preferred embodiment, the separator includes a second tangential
19 inlet at the vessel's first end for the introduction of a second fluid such as
20 dilution water.

1 In another aspect, the invention is directed to a method for desanding
2 a conditioned aqueous oil sand slurry containing aerated bitumen, water and
3 solids, comprising the steps of:

4 • providing a cyclonic separator having a closed vessel forming an
5 elongate, substantially cylindrical vortex chamber, said vessel
6 having a tangential feed inlet at its first end, a centrally positioned
7 vortex finder at its second end for centrate removal and a
8 peripheral, preferably tangential, outlet for solids removal at its
9 second end, said vortex finder preferably having a vortex holding
10 disc extending radially and outwardly from the rim of the vortex
11 finder;

12 • tangentially introducing the slurry into the chamber at its first end to
13 form a rotating vortex;

14 • centrifugally separating the rotating slurry as it advances through
15 the chamber to form an outer layer containing a major portion of
16 coarse solids, an inner core containing a major portion of the
17 aerated bitumen and an intermediate layer of middlings;

18 • separately removing the aerated bitumen core, together with some
19 middlings, through the vortex finder to produce a lean froth stream
20 for further processing;

21 • separately removing the outer layer, together with some middlings,
22 through the peripheral outlet to produce a tailings stream for
23 disposal; and

1 • preferably utilizing more than one cycloseparator in series to
2 minimize bitumen loss in the coarse tailings.

3 In another aspect, the invention is directed to a method for treating a
4 slurry comprising bitumen, water and sand to separate bitumen from sand
5 and water, comprising: providing a closed separator vessel having first and
6 second ends and forming an internal separation chamber comprising an
7 elongate cylindrical vortex chamber, said vessel having a tangential slurry
8 inlet at its first end, a centrally positioned vortex finder at its second end, and
9 a peripheral sand removal outlet at its second end, said vortex finder having a
10 first end positioned in the vortex chamber and a second end extending
11 outside the separation chamber; continually tangentially introducing slurry into
12 the separation chamber at its first end to form a rotating vortex; subjecting the
13 rotating slurry to centrifugal force in the vortex chamber for sufficient retention
14 time for the slurry to separate into an outer layer containing the major portion
15 of the sand, an inner core containing the major portion of the bitumen and an
16 intermediate middlings layer; separately removing the core, together with
17 some middlings, through the vortex finder as centrate; and separately
18 removing the outer layer, together with some middlings, through the
19 peripheral outlet as effluent.

20 In another aspect, the invention is a cyclonic separator comprising: a
21 closed vessel having first and second ends and forming an internal separation
22 chamber comprising an elongate cylindrical vortex chamber, said vessel
23 having a tangential feed inlet at its first end; the vessel having a centrally
24 positioned vortex finder at its second end for centrate removal, said vortex

1 finder having its first end positioned in the vortex chamber and its second end
2 extending outside the separation chamber; said vessel having a peripheral
3 outlet at its second end for solids removal.

4

5 **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

6 Figure 1 is a cross-section of the cycloseparator.

7 Figure 2 is a cross-section of the cycloseparator showing the
8 separation of coarse tailings from bitumen froth and middlings.

9 Figure 3 is a schematic showing a test circuit including the
10 cycloseparator.

11

12 **DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT**

13 For convenience of description, the following preferred embodiment
14 references the cyclonic separator in its upright position so that the feed inlet is
15 at the top of the apparatus and the product outlets are at the bottom of the
16 apparatus. However, the apparatus may be deployed and operated in
17 virtually any orientation.

18 Further, the apparatus about to be described is a unit that was tested
19 experimentally. Such a unit would need to be scaled up for commercial
20 application.

21 Figure 1 shows in cross-section the cyclonic separator having two
22 tangential inlets, one tangential outlet and a centrally positioned vortex finder.
23 More particularly, the cycloseparator 1 comprises a closed vessel 1a having a
24 cylindrical feed section 2, closed by a slightly convex top wall 3. The feed

1 section 2 and top wall 3 form a mixing chamber 2a. Affixed tangentially to the
2 feed section 2 is a feed inlet pipe 4 that receives the oil sand slurry directly
3 from a pipeline or the like. The slurry is introduced into the feed section
4 tangentially in order to create a vortex 5. A second fluid inlet pipe 6 is also
5 affixed tangentially to the feed section 2. This inlet pipe 6 receives a second
6 fluid such as water for dilution of the slurry if necessary. The tangential
7 addition of a second fluid also helps in the creation of the slurry vortex.

8 Attached to the feed section 2 is a converging or conical section 7 for
9 accelerating the tangential velocity of the vortex, thereby enhancing and
10 stabilizing the vortex. The section 7 forms an internal chamber 7a. Attached
11 to the converging section 7 is a cylindrical section 8 forming an internal vortex
12 chamber 8a of such a length as to ensure sufficient residence time of the
13 vortex so that separation of solids greater than 44 microns from the bitumen
14 froth will result. Separation in the centrifugal field occurs as a result of the
15 differences in specific gravity; the bitumen froth having a density lower than 1
16 g/cm^3 is displaced to the center of the vortex about the axis of chamber 8a
17 while the coarse solids having an average density of 2.65 g/cm^3 tend to
18 migrate to the periphery of the spiraling fluid.

19 A second converging section 10 is attached to the cylindrical section 8
20 and forms an internal bottom chamber or effluent chamber 10a. An end wall
21 11 closes the vessel 1a at its bottom end. An outlet pipe 13, communicating
22 with the effluent chamber 10a at its periphery extends tangentially from the
23 second section 10. The coarse solids-containing effluent exits through pipe
24 13.

1 Extending upwardly through end wall 11 into the effluent chamber 10a
2 and partially into the vortex chamber 8a is the centrally mounted tubular
3 vortex finder 14. The finder 14 is equipped with an annular vortex holding
4 disc 15 attached to its upper rim 16. The vortex holding disc 15 helps to
5 prevent the vortex from wandering and therefore prevents the centrate from
6 discharging into the effluent. The vortex finder 14 forms an outlet 17 for the
7 centrate. The inner diameter of the vortex finder 14 is such that the bitumen
8 froth and part of the middlings exit through the vortex finder.

9 The process for separating bitumen froth and middlings from the
10 coarse tailings can be better understood with reference to Figure 2. This
11 process of separation is termed co-current centrifugal separation because
12 both products flow in the same direction in a centrifugal field.

13 Oil sand slurry 18 is tangentially introduced into the cylindrical feed
14 section 2 of the cycloseparator 1 via the large diameter tangential slurry inlet
15 4 at a sufficient feed rate and velocity to form the vortex 5. Dilution water 19
16 is simultaneously added to the cycloseparator 1 via the second tangential
17 inlet 6. The dilution water 19 mixes with the slurry and assists in the
18 formation of the vortex.

19 The diluted slurry then passes through the transitional converging
20 chamber 7a and into the cylindrical vortex chamber 8a. The step down in
21 diameter between the feed chamber 2a and the vortex chamber 8a
22 accelerates the tangential velocity of the diluted slurry due to momentum
23 conservation, thereby enhancing and stabilizing the vortex 5. Once the slurry
24 is in the vortex chamber 8a, the aerated bitumen froth forms the core 20 of

1 the vortex 5. A layer 21 of middlings surrounds the bitumen froth core 20.
2 The coarse tailings migrate to the outside of the vortex 5 and form a layer 22.
3 By the time the vortex 5 reaches the vortex holding disc 15, the sand and
4 other large objects such as rocks and lumps are at the periphery of the vortex
5 chamber 8 and therefore by-pass the disc 15 and hence the finder 14. These
6 coarse tailings continue down through the vortex chamber 8a to the effluent
7 chamber 10a where they are tangentially discharged from the separator via
8 the outlet pipe 13.

9 The centrate comprised of aerated bitumen froth and middlings is
10 discharged through the vortex finder 14. The vortex holding disc 15 helps to
11 ensure that the centrate does not exit via the tangential outlet pipe 13.

12 The volumetric flow ratio between the light centrate (bitumen froth and
13 middlings) and the heavy effluent (rocks, lumps and sand) can be controlled
14 by throttling the effluent flow by means of a pump 30, a valve or a second
15 stage cycloseparator. The percent flow of heavy effluent versus light centrate
16 is determined by the initial density of the slurry feed. This is an important
17 feature in that the density of oil sand slurry preparations will vary greatly
18 depending upon the grade of oil sand used, the time of year the slurry was
19 prepared, the technique employed to mix oil sand with water, etc.

20 The pressure drop in the cycloseparator is relatively low (typically 2 to
21 3 p.s.i.). Therefore, it is possible to connect two or more cycloseparators in a
22 series without having to use interstage pumps.

1 The following example shows how the cycloseparator can be used to
2 obtain a bitumen froth stream and a separate coarse tailings stream from oil
3 sand slurry.

4 **Example**

5 A system in accordance with Figure 3 was used for the following
6 experiment. Multiphase 3-dimensional computer flow simulations were
7 performed to model the hydraulics in the centrifugal vortex in the
8 cyclone separator. The results of the simulations were used to optimize the
9 geometry of the separator and its performance. The dimensions of the
10 cyclone separator used in the following experiment are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Dimensions	
Mixing Chamber A	36 inches in diameter
Vortex Chamber B	30 inches in diameter and 60 inches in length
Cycloseparator C	112 inches in length

13
14 In the irrotational vortex formed in the cycloseparator, the tangential slurry
15 velocity increases towards the center according to the law of momentum
16 conservation. Hence, the highest centrifugal forces exist along the axis of the
17 vortex and diminish towards the periphery. The elongate cylindrical vortex
18 chamber combined with the co-current flow regime allows for extended
19 residence time in the centrifugal field.

1 Oil sand slurry was prepared by mixing as-mined oil sand with water at
2 either 50°C or 30°C. The density of the slurry was adjusted to 1.52 S.G. The
3 slurry was first mixed in a mixing vessel for 15 minutes and then discharged
4 from the mixing vessel to the separator via a pump through a 10 inch inner
5 diameter pipe that was connected to the tangential feed inlet. The inlet
6 velocity of the slurry was 3.5 m/s. Water, in the amount of twenty percent by
7 volume of the main flow of the slurry, was simultaneously added via the
8 second tangential inlet to dilute the slurry.

9 The coarse tailings were removed via the bottom tangential outlet into
10 a collection vessel at a flow rate equal to the pipeline flow rate. The bitumen
11 froth and middlings exited via the vortex finder and were collected in a holding
12 tank. Gravity separation of the middlings from the bitumen froth occurred
13 rapidly in the holding tank and a layer of oily froth formed almost immediately
14 while the middlings settled at the bottom of the holding tank.

15 The following table lists the compositions, in weight percent, of the
16 initial slurry, the coarse tailings and the bitumen froth layer produced.

Table 2

	Wt % Bitumen	Wt % Water	Wt % Solids
Oil Sand Slurry	5.8	28.0	66.2
Coarse Tailings	1.05	35.6	63.4
Bitumen Froth Layer	63.8	23.0	13.2

3 Table 2 shows that the bitumen froth layer was comprised primarily of
4 bitumen and the coarse tailings was comprised primarily of solids.

1 THE EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION IN WHICH AN
2 EXCLUSIVE PROPERTY OR PRIVILEGE IS CLAIMED ARE DEFINED AS
3 FOLLOWS:

4 1. A method for desanding a conditioned aqueous oil sand slurry
5 comprising aerated bitumen, water and sand to produce pumpable,
6 pipelineable lean froth and tailings, comprising the steps of:

7 providing a separator vessel having first and second ends and forming
8 an elongated cylindrical separation chamber, said vessel having a tangential
9 slurry inlet at its first end, a centrally positioned vortex finder at its second
10 end, said vortex finder having its first end positioned in the separation
11 chamber and its second end extending outside the separation chamber, and
12 a peripheral sand removal outlet at its second end;

13 continually tangentially introducing slurry into the chamber at its first
14 end to form a rotating vortex;

15 subjecting the rotating slurry to centrifugal force in the separation
16 chamber for sufficient retention time for the slurry to separate into an outer
17 layer containing a major portion of the sand, an inner core containing a major
18 portion of the aerated bitumen and an intermediate middlings layer;

19 separately removing the core, together with some middlings, through
20 the vortex finder to produce a lean froth stream; and

separately removing the outer layer, together with some middlings, through the peripheral outlet to produce a tailings stream.

1 2 A method as set forth in Claim 1 wherein said separator vessel has
2 a second tangential inlet at its first end for the introduction of a second fluid
3 and includes the step of continually tangentially introducing a second fluid into
4 said vessel at its first end to dilute the slurry.

5

6 3. A method as set forth in Claim 1 wherein said vortex finder has a
7 vortex holding disc extending radially and outwardly from the rim of the vortex
8 finder.

9

10 4. A method as set forth in Claims 1 or 2 wherein said peripheral sand
11 removal outlet is tangential.

12

13 5. A method as set forth in Claims 1 or 2 comprising providing a pump
14 connected to the peripheral sand removal outlet and controlling the ratio of
15 the tailings to lean froth to minimize loss of oil with the tailings.

16

17 6. A cyclonic separator for desanding a conditioned aqueous oil sand
18 slurry comprising aerated bitumen, water and sand to produce pumpable,
19 pipelineable lean froth and tailings comprising:

20 a closed vessel having first and second ends and forming an
21 elongated, substantially cylindrical separation chamber, said vessel having a
22 tangential feed inlet at its first end; a centrally positioned vortex finder at its
23 second end for centrate removal, said vortex finder having a first end
24 positioned in the separation chamber and a second end extending outside the

1 separation chamber; and a peripheral outlet at its second end for solids
2 removal wherein said peripheral outlet is tangential.

3

4 7. A cyclonic separator as set forth in Claim 6 wherein said vessel has
5 a second tangential inlet at its first end for the introduction of dilution water.

6

7 8. A cyclonic separator as set forth in Claim 6 wherein said vortex
8 finder has a vortex holding disc extending radially and outwardly from the rim
9 of the vortex finder.

10

11 9. A cyclonic separator for desanding a conditioned aqueous oil sand
12 slurry comprising aerated bitumen, water and sand to produce pumpable,
13 pipelineable lean froth and tailings comprising:

14 a closed vessel having first and second ends, a side wall and first and
15 second end walls, said vessel forming a separation chamber, said vessel
16 comprising, in sequence from its first end wall, a cylindrical feed section, a
17 first converging section of downwardly diminishing diameter, an elongated
18 cylindrical vortex section, and a second converging section of downwardly
19 diminishing diameter;

20 the side wall forming tangential feed inlet means communicating with
21 the separation chamber at the feed section;

22 the side wall forming outlet means communicating with the separation
23 chamber and leading from the periphery of the second converging section
24 wherein said outlet means is tangential; and

1 a vortex finder, centrally positioned in the second end of the separation
2 chamber, extending through the second end wall and communicating with the
3 separation chamber.

4

5 10. A cyclonic separator as set forth in Claim 9 wherein said vessel
6 has a second tangential inlet means extending through the side wall at its first
7 end and communicating with the separation chamber.

8

9 11. A cyclonic separator as set forth in Claim 9 or 10 wherein said
10 vortex finder has a vortex holding disc extending radially and outwardly from
11 the rim of the vortex finder.

12

13 12. A method for desanding a conditioned aqueous oil sand slurry
14 comprising aerated bitumen, water and sand to produce pumpable,
15 pipelineable lean froth and tailings, comprising the steps of:

16 providing a cyclonic separator comprising a closed vessel having first
17 and second ends, said vessel having a side wall and first and second end
18 walls and forming a separation chamber, said vessel comprising, in sequence
19 from its first end wall, a cylindrical feed section, a first converging section of
20 diminishing diameter, an elongated cylindrical vortex section, and a second
21 converging section of diminishing diameter, said vessel also comprising a
22 tangential feed inlet means extending through the side wall and
23 communicating with the separation chamber at the feed section, an outlet
24 means communicating with the separation chamber and leading from the

1 periphery of the second converging section, and a vortex finder, centrally
2 positioned in the lower end of the separation chamber, extending through the
3 second end wall and communicating with the separation chamber;

4 continually tangentially introducing slurry into the cylindrical feed
5 section of said vessel to form a rotating vortex;

6 passing the slurry through the first converging section to accelerate the
7 rotating vortex;

8 passing the slurry through the elongated cylindrical vortex section
9 thereby subjecting the rotating slurry to centrifugal force for sufficient retention
10 time for the slurry to separate into an outer layer containing a major portion of
11 the sand, an inner core containing a major portion of the aerated bitumen and
12 an intermediate middlings layer;

13 separately removing the core, together with some middlings, through
14 the vortex finder to produce a lean froth stream; and

15 separately removing the outer layer, together with some middlings,
16 through the outlet means to produce a tailings stream.

17

18 13. A method as set forth in Claim 12 wherein said vessel has a
19 second tangential inlet at its first end for the introduction of a second fluid and
20 includes the step of continually tangentially introducing a second fluid into
21 said vessel at its first end to dilute the slurry.

1 14. A method as set forth in Claim 12 wherein said vortex finder has a
2 vortex holding disc extending radially and outwardly from the rim of the vortex
3 finder.

4

5 15. A method as set forth in Claim 12 wherein said outlet means is
6 tangential.

7

8 16. A method as set forth in Claim 12 comprising providing a pump
9 connected to the outlet means and controlling the ratio of the tailings to
10 centrate to minimize loss of oil with the tailings.

11

12 17. A method for treating a slurry comprising bitumen, water and sand
13 to separate bitumen from sand and water, comprising:

14 providing a closed separator vessel having first and second ends and
15 forming an internal separation chamber comprising an elongate cylindrical
16 vortex chamber, said vessel having a tangential slurry inlet at its first end, a
17 centrally positioned vortex finder at its second end, and a peripheral sand
18 removal outlet at its second end, said vortex finder having a first end
19 positioned in the vortex chamber and a second end extending outside the
20 separation chamber;

21 continually tangentially introducing slurry into the separation chamber
22 at its first end to form a rotating vortex;

- 1 subjecting the rotating slurry to centrifugal force in the vortex chamber
- 2 for sufficient retention time for the slurry to separate into an outer layer
- 3 containing most of the sand, an inner core containing most of the bitumen
- 4 and an intermediate middlings layer;
- 5 separately removing the core, together with some middlings, through
- 6 the vortex finder as centrate; and
- 7 separately removing the outer layer, together with some middlings,
- 8 through the peripheral outlet as effluent.

9
10 18. The method as set forth in claim 17 wherein:
11 the separator vessel has a second tangential inlet at its first end for
12 the introduction of additional water; and
13 comprising tangentially introducing additional water into the separation
14 chamber at its first end to dilute the slurry.

15

16 19. The method as set forth in claim 17 or 18 comprising:

17 providing means for regulating flow, connected to the peripheral sand

18 removal outlet; and

19 controlling said means so as to control the volumetric ratio of the

20 centrate and effluent to reduce loss of bitumen with the effluent.

21
22 20. The method as set forth in claim 17 or 18 wherein the centrate
23 contains less than 15% solids and more than 10% bitumen.

1 21. A cyclonic separator for desanding an oil sand slurry comprising:
2 a closed vessel having first and second ends and forming an internal
3 separation chamber comprising an elongate cylindrical vortex chamber, said
4 vessel having a tangential feed inlet at its first end;
5 the vessel having a centrally positioned vortex finder at its second end
6 for centrate removal, said vortex finder having its first end positioned in the
7 vortex chamber and its second end extending outside the separation
8 chamber;
9 said vessel having a peripheral outlet at its second end for solids
10 removal.

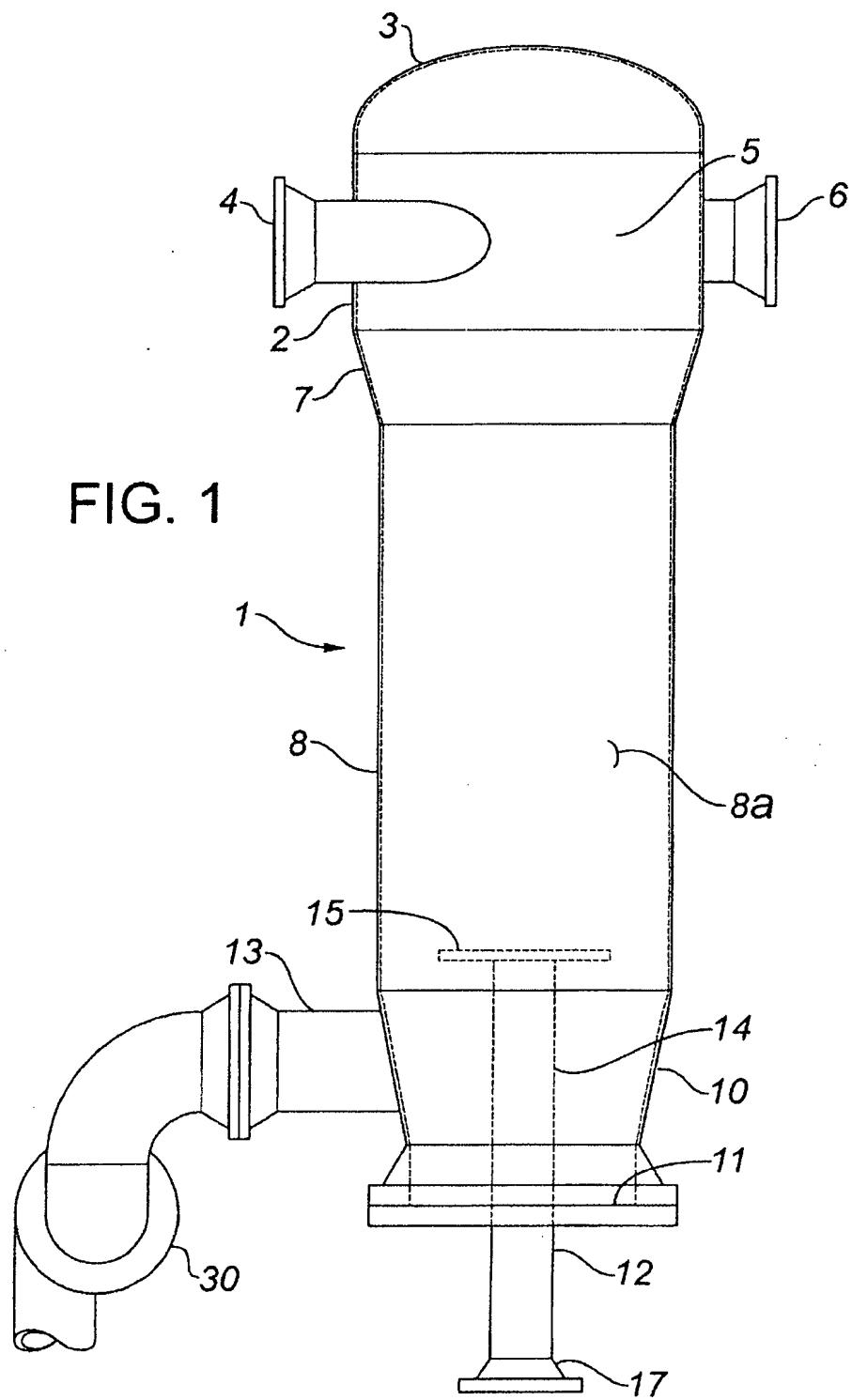
11
12 22. A cyclonic separator as set forth in claim 21 wherein the peripheral
13 outlet is tangential and the vessel has a second tangential inlet at its first end.

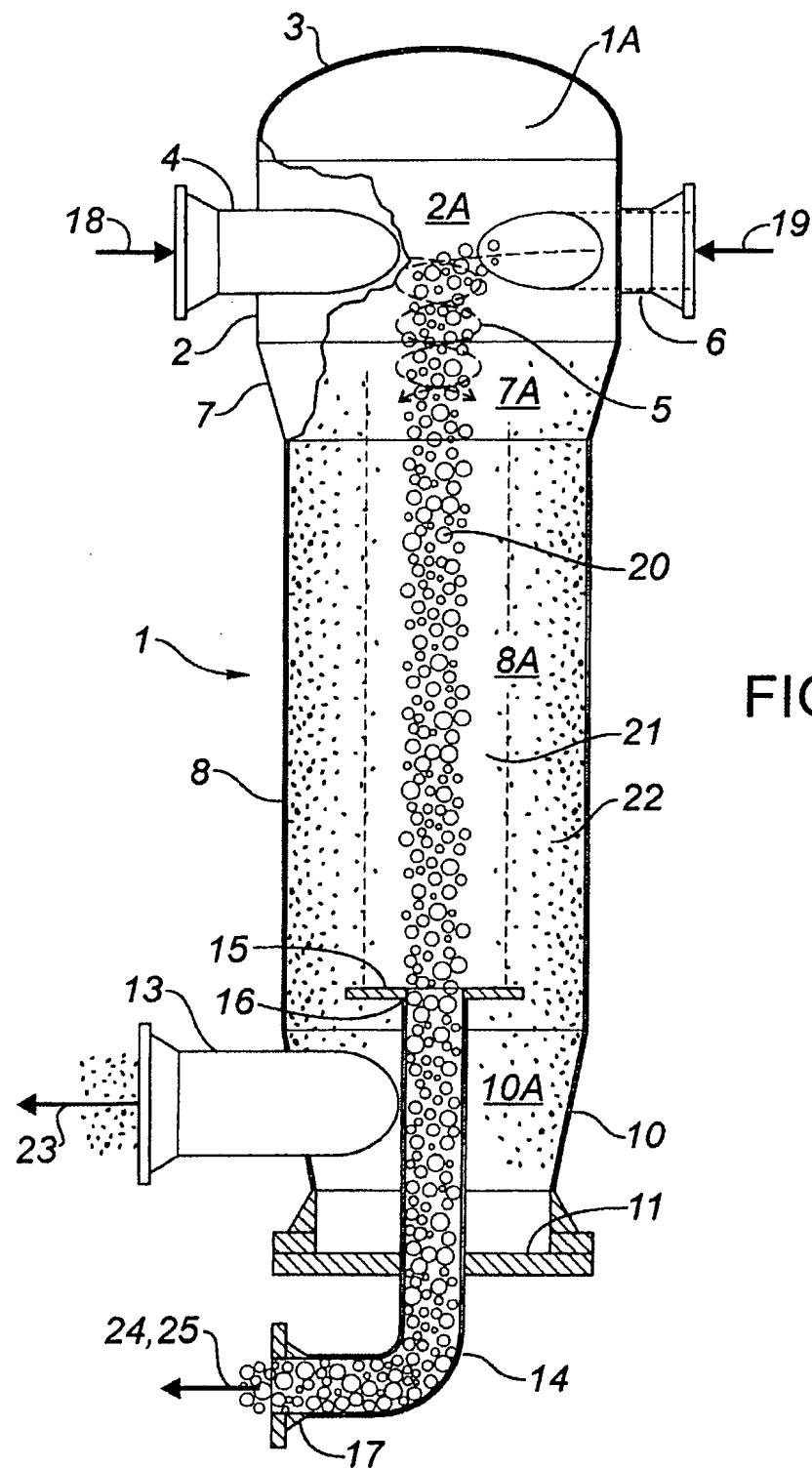
14
15 23. A cyclonic separator as set forth in claim 21 and 22 wherein said
16 vortex finder has a vortex holding disc extending radially and outwardly from
17 the rim of the vortex finder.

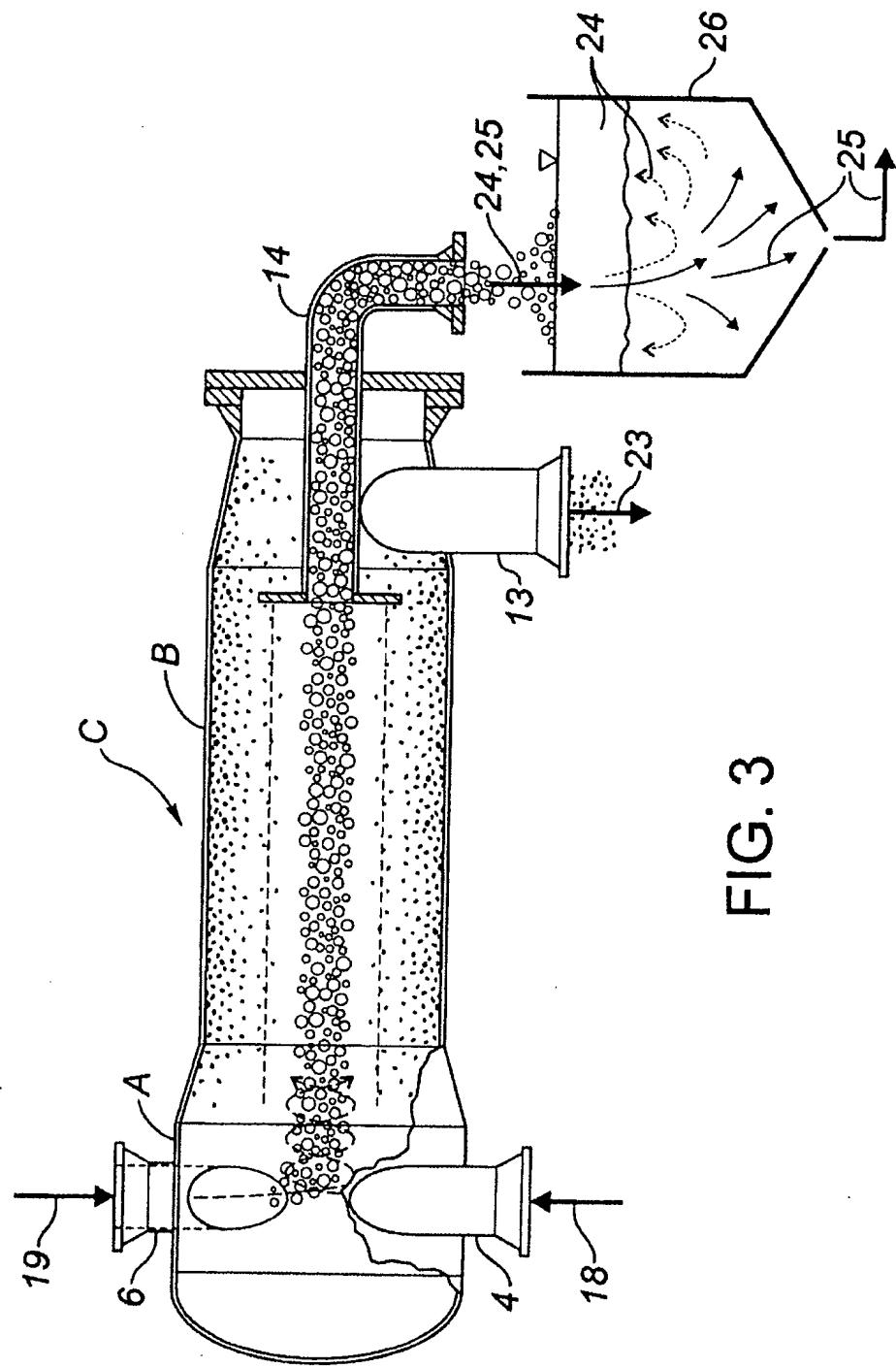
18
19 24. A cyclonic separator for treating a slurry comprising bitumen, water
20 and sand to separate bitumen from sand and water, comprising:
21 a closed vessel having first and second ends and forming an internal
22 separation chamber comprising an elongate cylindrical vortex chamber, said
23 vessel having a tangential feed inlet at its first end;

1 the vortex chamber being of sufficient length so that slurry, introduced
2 tangentially into the separation chamber, will form a rotating vortex and will
3 separate into an outer layer containing most of the sand, an inner core
4 containing most of the bitumen and an intermediate middlings layer;
5 the vessel having a centrally positioned vortex finder at its second end
6 for removing a centrate comprising the core together with some middlings,
7 said vortex finder having a first end positioned in the vortex chamber and a
8 second end extending outside the separation chamber; and
9 said vessel having a peripheral outlet at its second end for removing an
10 effluent comprising the outer layer together with some middlings.

11
12 25. A cyclonic separator as set forth in claim 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 21, 22,
13 23 or 24 wherein the vessel is operative to treat up to 40,000 U.S. gallons per
14 minute.







3
FIG